

Mein Leben

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Summary: Sideswipe finds out what his nickname really means. Post "Hardened Sparks." One-shot.

Mein Leben

Denny hefted the crate of garden gnomes in his arms. It was heavy for its size—these were hand-carved out of solid stone, not the cheap plaster that most things were made out of nowadays. That trait made them unique, and therefore valuable, if only to a connoisseur like himself. He strained to lift the crate onto the shelf in front of him.

The roar of an engine suddenly echoed through the yard. Denny hastily flattened himself against the shelf as a red Lamborghini raced past, at a speed that was far too fast for this enclosed space. The car screeched to a halt and spun around to face Denny. The door popped open and Russell's head poked out.

"Sorry, Dad!" He cried. His brow furrowed with concern. "Are you okay?!"

"I'm fine." Denny said as he peeled himself away from the shelf. Thankfully, so were the garden gnomes, he confirmed with a glance. "But I'd appreciate it if you and Sideswipe would race outside the yard."

"Sorry, Denny. We were just on our way out," the Lamborghini assured him.

"Do you need any help before we go?" Russell asked, clearly trying to make up for the error.

Denny smiled at his son's consideration. "Actually, if Sideswipe could put this box up for me, that'd be great."

The Lamborghini let out a low grumble, but obligingly transformed. He tucked the heavy box into its proper place with one hand and no apparent effort. One of the perks of living with giant robots—"heavy lifting got a lot easier. "Thanks," he told Sideswipe as the young bot transformed and let Russell back in. "Stay out of trouble, all right?"

Sideswipe chuckled. "That might be hard. I'm a troublemaker. Or a *mein leben*, as Knockout would say."

Denny raised an eyebrow. "A what?"

"A *mein leben*. It means troublemaker. Knockout used to call me that whenever I did something stupid."

"It sounds German," Denny mused.

"It's some Earth language. Anyway, ready to go, Russell?"

"You bet!" The boy answered gleefully. The Lamborghini tore off with a dirt cloud and a cry of "See ya, Denny!" Denny coughed as the dust settled, both on the ground and in his lungs. Time for a break, he decided. The word Sideswipe had said lingered in his mind. It really did sound German—"even an amateur like him knew that "mein" meant "my." But "leben" didn't sound right for "troublemaker"!

Hmm. Well, he had a German dictionary in the trailer. This mystery could be settled quickly.

* * *

><p>The sun was a red glow on the horizon by the time Sideswipe pulled back into the scrapyard.</p>

Russell climbed out. "That was a crazy day! You're gonna get a bazillion tickets if that policeman ever catches you."

"'If' being the key word there," Sideswipe said smugly. He transformed into robot mode and stretched his limbs. "Besides, he overreacted. I didn't hit him that hard. Barely nudged him."

Russell smirked. "But you 'barely nudged' him into a hedge."

"Pft. That bush was ugly anyway." Sideswipe said dismissively. "Wanna play some video games before bed?"

"Not tonight. I'm beat." Russell stifled a yawn. He started walking to his trailer, but Sideswipe scooped him up before he'd gotten far and carried him the rest of the way. They found Denny lounging outside, flipping through a thick book.

"Hey, Dad." Russell frowned as Sideswipe set him back on the ground. "Are you reading a dictionary?"

"German dictionary. I was looking stuff up and kinda got lost." Denny snapped the book shut. "You guys have fun?"

"Ooh, yeah." Russell yawned again. "I'm going to bed. Good night." He trudged up the steps and disappeared inside the motor home.

"I'm pretty wiped out, too. G'night, Denny." Sideswipe turned to go, but Denny stopped him.

"Before you goâ€"what was that name you said Knockout called you?"

"Mein leben." Sideswipe frowned. "Why?"

"You said it was an Earth language, so I did some research. I found a German phrase that fits it, butâ€" Denny paused. "It doesn't mean anything close to 'troublemaker.'"

Sideswipe raised an eye-ridge. "Then what's itâ€"oh, scrud," he muttered. "Don't tell me Knockout's been calling me a scrapheap or something all my life?"

"No, no, nothing like that." Denny frowned at his dictionary. "Kinda the opposite, actually. It means 'my life.'"

Sideswipe blinked. "â€|What?"

"It's two wordsâ€" 'mein' meaning 'my,' and 'leben' meaning 'life.' My life. If it's German, that is." Denny shrugged. "I could be wrong."

Sideswipe didn't respond. "My life"â€"that couldn't be right. It didn't make sense. Not only because it didn't match what Knockout had told him, but becauseâ€"

"Knockout would never say anything that sappy," Sideswipe muttered, as much to himself as to Denny.

The human just gave another shrug. "Maybe that's why he told you it meant 'troublemaker.'"

No, still ridiculous. And yetâ€| Memories came unbidden into Sideswipe's mind. His guardian's voice softly chiding him: _Don't do that again, mein lebenâ€| you're going to be the death of me, mein leben_. Always more concerned than annoyed. And then the rare occasions when Sideswipe wasn't getting into trouble, when he was upset or scared, and Knockout would whisper "_mein leben_" as he comforted the sparkling. Like it was an endearment rather than the reprimand he'd made it out to be.

"â€|Can I see that dictionary?" Sideswipe finally asked.

* * *

><p>Knockout was cleaning his tools when his young charge sidled up.</p>

"Please tell me you didn't break something." Knockout said without looking up.

Sideswipe shook his head. "_Nein, vater_."

Knockout glanced up to raise an eye-ridge at Sideswipe. "When did you start speaking German?"

"I looked up a few things today." Sideswipe's optics sparkled

mischievously. "Including the word for 'troublemaker.' "

Knockout stopped what he was doing.

"Spoiler alert: it's not '_mein leben._'" Sideswipe smirked at his guardan's discomfort.

Knockout carefully set aside the wrench he'd been polishing. He rubbed the back of his helm awkwardly. "Yes, wellâ€| my translation may not have been entirely accurate."

Sideswipe's smirk widened, belying the contentment he was truly feeling. Leave it to Knockout to express affection in a way that even the receiver couldn't understand. "_Gut nachte, mein vater," he said teasingly.

Knockout finally met his gaze. There was gentleness in his optics as he gave a soft smile. "_Gut nachteâ€| mein leben."

End
file.